TELLS THE FACTS AND NAMES THE NAMES

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Education as "Soft Power"

Inside the American University of Iraq

By Mark Grueter

The cover of the brochure for the American University of Iraq, based in Sulaimani, Iraqi Kurdistan, features a picture of an enormous, very modern-looking building that *does not exist*. The actual AUI-S building, though nice enough, is much more modest. And that's mostly just where they keep the administrators. The teachers and students conduct classes outside in rows of box-shaped huts, which some students call "chicken shacks", set up in front of the building.

The nonexistent, awe-inspiring campus building featured in the university's promotional pamphlet and on the AUI-S website is cheerily described this way:

"Today, just a short drive across Sulaimani, on a sprawling one-hundred-eighty hectare parcel of land, construction crews are *finishing the interior* of a ten-thousand square meter, state-of-the-art Presidency Building, which will be the flagship edifice of the new AUI-S campus. By *September 2010*, this impressive, high-tech and *ecologically sound* five-level structure will house the University administration, as well as a series of comfortable classrooms and larger lecture halls. [italics mine]."

These are ludicrous claims. Blueprints in hand, I visited the site twice in June 2009: they haven't finished the exterior, the foundation, never mind *the interior*. It's just a big slab of cement with some loose wires and a lot of dirt and dust kicking around. Thinking they'd be impressed, the university chancellor wanted the students to see this construction site mess, so some of us took the students

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From "Gentle Pursuasion" to "Better Killing"

Anthropology, Human Terrain's Prehistory, and the Role of Culture in Wars Waged by Robots

By David Price

"Agricola first laid waste the land. Then he displayed to the natives his moderation." Tacitus.

A core feature of the Obama administration's plans for victories in Iraq and Afghanistan has been an increased reliance on counterinsurgency, as Americans try to win the hearts and minds of peoples whose countries they've invaded. Some critics highlight similarities between Kennedy's and Obama's interest in counterinsurgency as a tool to conquer peoples who have historically been difficult, if not impossible, for outside colonial powers to dominate. President Obama's reliance on old Harvard hands to socially engineer conquest justifies many of these comparisons.

Even counterinsurgency's lustiest cheerleaders, such as the political scientist David Kilcullen, admit that historical instances of successfully using counterinsurgency for military victories have been extremely rare in the past half-century. But Washington's counterinsurgency believers share a certain hubris, or vanity, that they are clever enough to overcome this daunting record of historical failure.

While political science was the academic discipline which the wars of the twentieth century drew upon, the asymmetrical wars of the twenty-first century now look toward anthropology with hopes of finding models of culture, or data on specific cultures to be conquered or to be used in counterinsurgency operations. But anthropology is not political science, and anthropologists have different commitments to those who share their lives and vulnerabilities with them.

The counterinsurgency program generating the greatest friction among anthropologists today is Human Terrain Systems (HTS) – a program with over 400 employees, originally operating through private contractors and now in the process of being taken over by the U.S. Army. Human Terrain embeds anthropologists with military units to ease the occupation and conquest of Iraqis and Afghanis – with plans to extend these operations in Africa through expanding units with AFRICOM. Some HTS social scientists are armed, others choose not to. In the last two years, three HTS social scientists have been killed in the course of their work, and HTS member Don Ayala recently pled guilty in U.S. District Court to killing an Afghan (whom Ayala shot in the head-execution style while the victim was detained with his hands cuffed behind him) who had attacked HTS social scientist Paula Loyd.

The anthropologist Montgomery McFate has become the public spokesperson for Human Terrain, and while she has increasingly pulled back from public discussions of the workings and implications of Human Terrain, in reading her early writings on British counterinsurgency operations against the IRA, we find a model of how she (and, it appears, her military sponsors) view anthropology working as a tool for military conquest. Supporters of HTS claim the program uses embedded social scientists to help reduce "kinetic engagements," or unnecessary violent contacts with the popula-

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GRUETER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

out there on a cripplingly hot afternoon and then left almost as soon as we had arrived, when it became clear how pointless of a trip it was.

"What are we supposed to be looking at?" asked one confused student. Another student revealingly explained to me, "Some students are only acting like they're interested because they think that's what AUI-S wants." And they're right. That's one thing that's so disturbing about the organization: many students behave like subjects eager to please their masters.

I don't know what to say about such throwaway lines like the "ecologically sound" boast toward the end of the chirpy PR pitch quoted above. In a country like Iraq, what could that possibly mean?

Last year, I was hired by the American University of Iraq, as an English lecturer. AUI-S has been in business since October 2007, promising an "American-style liberal arts education" for Iraqi students. I wondered about the name from the beginning. For one thing, it more or less declares itself a neoimperialist venture in the "soft power" sense. And, by rubbing the "American" name in, doesn't AUI-S further set itself up as a target for any would-be terrorist? But I took the job because I thought I could do some good; I've taught overseas before (in Russia), and I thought it would be fascinating to work in Iraq: the money was good, and it became clear to me that I'd be free to teach how and what I pleased.

Some background on AUI-S: it was founded by a prominent group of Kurdish politicians (including Iraqi President Jalal Talabani) and American neoconservatives. Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Barham Salih was the prime mover, and the team hired an American, John Agresto, to begin AUI-S as chancellor. Agresto had been working in Baghdad with the Coalition Provisional Authority before undertaking the American University project. Agresto has ties to both Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney. He used to work with Lynne Cheney at the National Endowment for the Humanities.

When Chancellor Mitchell does appear, he makes it a point to showcase his Christian beliefs, often quoting from the Bible during speeches, talks, and in email sermons to yours truly.

Given these facts, it is not surprising that AUI-S functions more like a political tool, rather than as an educational enterprise. That, of course, does not stop its leaders from promoting AUI-S as a real university bent on spreading democracy. Create the appearance of a thriving western-style university in Iraq and then cite it as evidence of Iraq's progress toward a liberal democracy. That is pretty much the idea. It looks good on paper for both pro-war cheerleaders and Iraqi politicians in power to brag about. However, almost everything about AUI-S is artificial.

Nobody actually believes that the new campus or even the one shadow building will be finished by September 2010, assuming it's ever completed, which I tend to doubt. In a fantasyland, I guess it doesn't matter: it sounds much nicer to say that it will be done soon, and that's all that counts, right? The point of the campus description is not to be honest but to attract potential investors. (Just like the amusing but quickly tiresome "AUI-S 3-D Flyover" video – http://www.auis.org/index.php/AUI-S-3D-Flyover.html – depicting the future campus, complete with a glorious soundtrack.)

AUI-S is a private university. We don't know where the money comes from exactly, because AUI-S does not release such information. All we know, according to published reports, is that it received $10 million grants from both the U.S. and the Kurdistan regional government – pocket change for a university with a $500 million budget and even loftier ambitions for the future. But it's impossible for me to say where that money is spent, aside from bloated administration salaries and digitally animated videos.

The important work of actually teaching students, as I learned in a most unpleasant way, takes a back seat to everything, especially to the egos of the administrators, including the current chancellor Joshua Mitchell. Mitchell is a straight-laced preppy conservative who both looks and sounds a lot like the *New York Times* columnist David Brooks. Mitchell makes little attempt to reach out to teachers or students. His driver pulls him up to the front door in a Mercedes every morning; he slithers into his office and is almost never heard from throughout the day. He's completely out of touch with what's actually happening on the ground level at AUI-S. When Mitchell does appear, he makes it a point to showcase his Christian beliefs, often quoting from the Bible during speeches, talks, and in email sermons to yours truly. For instance, he recently wrote to me, "You have shown yourself only too quick to point out the splinter in someone else's eye but not the beam in your own." (Matt 7:1-5) He ended a separate email lecture with a line that I could not find in the Bible, but which sounds Biblesque: "Be not a perfectionist, for the world you live in is a deeply flawed one, which seldom moves forward by force of arms or by the force of words."

So, it moves forward by force of fate or god? *What was* he talking about? Aside from his half a million dollar a year paycheck, one can only speculate about what the guy's motives are for being there. Personally, I think Mitchell believes he's

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doing missionary work for Jesus. The only indication that he is a neoconservative is that he was hired by Agresto … but that's not a bad indication. Whatever he is, I can assure you, he is a believer in the American presence in Iraq.

Now, to the point about politics as the priority over education: AUI-S quite simply and on many different levels misrepresents itself or more directly lies to people about what is actually going on there. According to the AUI-S website and the university's promotional materials, Iraqi students are required to score a 550 or above on the TOEFL exam in order to enter the undergraduate program. Last semester, this claim was exposed as fraudulent after it was learned that out of the 40 or so undergraduate students at AUI-S only a handful had scored 550. Students were being pushed through and into undergraduate study because, well, they had to be: there had to at least be a show of legitimacy.

When I write "pushed through," I mean, pushed through AUI-S's English preparatory program, which is where the great majority of AUI-S students are currently enrolled. Last semester, there were approximately 150 students in this program, compared to the 40 or so undergrads. So, basically, we have a "university" with at least three times as many pre-frosh as frosh. With at least 250 new students entering AUI-S this semester, that ratio promises to multiply considerably.

Another administrator worth mentioning is Rosalind Warfield-Brown, who is the chair of the aforementioned English prep program. Prior to joining AUI-S, Warfield-Brown had never run an ESL department. In fact, she's never even taught an ESL course. Nevertheless, as chair of this particular program, she is responsible for the majority of students at AUI-S.

Mitchell and Warfield-Brown preside over another false claim regarding the education: "At all levels of instruction at AUI-S, learning is enhanced by way of small, interactive classes…" This typical fallacy seriously frustrated teachers and hindered the quality of education.

With all of the millions supposedly coming in (toward the end of last semester, Mitchell kept bragging about a new $50 million grant he had pulled in), AUI-S *could* have the small class sizes it claims to have, but they simply refuse to hire enough teachers, citing cost concerns, of all things. Our classes – which primarily involve ESL-type instruction – were as large as 20 students per teacher. Ask any experienced ESL teacher if that's an effective way to conduct a class, especially when, in the case of AUI-S, students of widely different levels are enrolled in the same class. Again, education is simply not the priority. The result is a lot of overworked, burned-out teachers surrounded by an extremely needy group of students – students who deserve both more teachers and other personnel (like, say, guidance counselors) to meet their needs. Some students have scholarships, but most pay the annual tuition of $10,000, which is an extraordinary sum in that part of the world, as you might imagine.

When we consider reality versus stated claims of fantasy, the American University of Iraq, despite its "soft" intentions, is no exception to the overall failed policy of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

It should be noted that many of the students passed on other promising educational opportunities based on the claims made by AUI-S. Arrogant westerners often take it granted that they're doing the natives a favor just by being there, even though this presumption is both insulting and untrue. I fear many of the Iraqi students will be terribly disappointed when their American education doesn't land them the jobs they expected.

Additionally, if AUI-S were really interested in developing Iraq toward a civil society, it would, at least, make an attempt to integrate its staff into the community. I felt safe walking around the city. Instead, they seem hellbent on isolating "us" from "them," further promoting the imperialist-subject relationship, both in appearance and in practice. This segregationist mentality among most expats is something I always find so shockingly stupid. For AUI-S staff, they built an absurd mini-compound outside the city, near the airport. The streets are designed to look like something out of a Floridian residential neighborhood, complete with small palm trees and orange-pink villas. It was built in the middle of a wasteland, and far too remote for anyone to walk into the city. It is a laughable setup until it becomes a maddening one.

Like America's military invasion of Iraq, one could argue that the problem with AUI-S was not so much in the ideal as it was in the execution. Americans prove, time and again, how incapable we are of nation-building. Part of it is a lack of genuine willingness, and part is a lack of understanding of what it takes. When we consider reality versus stated claims of fantasy, the American University of Iraq, despite its "soft" intentions, is no exception to the overall failed policy of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. **CP**

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tions they encounter. The idea is to use these social scientists to interact with members of the community, creating relationships to reduce misunderstandings that can lead to unnecessarily violent interactions.

HTS sells itself to the public through remarkably well-organized domestic propaganda campaigns that have seen dozens of uncritical articles on HTS, with personality profiles, as a "peaceful" means of achieving victory.

Today, in Iraq and Afghanistan, anthropologists are being told that they're needed to make bad situations better. But no matter how anthropological contributions ease and make gentle this conquest and occupation, it will not change the larger neocolonial nature of the larger mission; and most anthropologists are troubled to see their discipline embrace such a politically corrupt cause.

Human Terrain Systems is not some neutral humanitarian project, it is an arm of the U.S. military and is part of the military's mission to occupy and destroy opposition to U.S. goals and objectives. HTS cannot claim the sort of neutrality claimed by groups like Doctors Without Borders, or the International Committee of the Red Cross. HTS's goal is a gentler form of domination. Pretending that the military is a humanitarian organization does not make it so, and pretending that HTS is anything other than an arm of the military engaging in a specific form of conquest is sheer dishonesty.

Human Terrain Systems and other counterinsurgency projects raise serious political, ethical and practical problems for anthropologists and other social scientists. Central to anthropologists' criticisms of the HTS program are concerns that HTS social scientists' reports can be used by military and intelligence agencies in ways that can make studied populations vulnerable. Safeguards protecting gathered data for use by military or intelligence agencies are absent. The leaked *Human Terrain Systems Handbook*, available on Wikileaks, clarifies the program's lack of ethical precautions to protect studied populations. In November of 2007, soon after HTS became public knowledge, the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association denounced HTS for its failure to assure that fundamental principles of anthropological ethics were being followed to assure the safety and protection of people being studied by HTS in the theaters of battle and occupation where HTS operates.

Because of HTS's obvious ethical problems and the American Anthropological Association's blunt condemnation of the program, HTS has had a difficult time recruiting qualified anthropologists to work on the program. Most HTS anthropologists have no significant regional fieldwork prior to their employment with the program. Over the last few months, so many managerial problems with HTS have come to light that it is being discontinued as a program run by private contractors, BAE Systems, and, as noted above, plans are underway for the program to be taken over by the Army. Whether or not HTS continues to exist as a program in the future is unclear, but regardless of the program's future, the military's appetites for ethnographic information and intelligence for counterinsurgency operations will continue. Because counterinsurgency has become the Obama administration's alchemical solution for the problems of Iraq and Afghanistan, we should consider the philosophical roots supporting the sickly promise of military victory, *not* simply *stability*, through culturally informed counterinsurgency. An examination of some important, ignored roots of the Human Terrain project can shed light on some of the ways that HTS and ethnographically informed counterinsurgency programs fit in with the larger developments in robotically dominated battlefields.

Human Terrain Systems is not some neutral humanitarian project, it is an arm of the U.S. military and is part of the military's mission to occupy and destroy opposition to U.S. goals and objectives.

While working on her doctorate in anthropology at Yale in the early 1990s, Montgomery McFate undertook fieldwork and library research focusing on the resistance of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and British military counterinsurgency campaigns in Northern Ireland. She was not yet married to stability operations specialist and retired army officer, Sean McFate, and her dissertation appears under her maiden name, Montgomery Carlough. She focused on the 1969-1982 period, and British army changes away from strictly tactical military responses to more culturally callibrated counterinsurgency campaigns during those years. McFate's research was supported by a mix of fellowships ranging from the National Science Foundation, Mellon, and several Yale-based fellowships directed toward international security issues.

McFate recently explained that her dissertation examined "how cultural narratives, handed down from generation to generation, contributed to war," and "how people justify violence." This resume might lead one to assume her research was balanced between the positions of the Irish insurgents and British counterinsurgents. Such an impression would be false. Her dissertation reads as a guide for militaries wanting to stop indigenous insurgent movements.

This was not a cultural study designed to give voice to the concerns of an oppressed people so that others might come to see their internal narrative as valid; it was designed to make those she studied vulnerable to cooption and defeat.

For her dissertation fieldwork, McFate made multiple trips to Ireland and met with members of the occupying British military and of the Provisional IRA, but when she wrote up her dissertation, she made a conscious decision not only not to identify whom she had spoken with, but also not to directly quote from these interactions. In her dissertation, McFate claimed that her decision not quote from these fieldwork experiences was done for disciplinary ethical reasons.

McFate's proclaimed concern in 1994 over the ethical protection of research participants is admirable, and stands in stark contrast to Human Terrain's later disregard of such ethical protections. It remains unknown what happened to her notes and other records from interviews with IRA members, but given McFate's current work in environments requiring security clearances, such past contacts and records would have raised

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many questions when she applied for her security clearance. It would be standard operating procedure during a security clearance background investigation to ask about the identity of her 1990s contacts with the Provisional IRA and other groups, as it would be to ask such a clearance applicant for field notes and other such material.

McFate's early counterinsurgency years provide a significantly less guarded glimpse at her (then) understanding of the promise of anthropology's role in counterinsurgency. This younger, less prudent McFate avoided the sort of softening language with which she now calls her "mercenaries" of yesteryear "independent military subcontractors". While she now avoids linking militarized anthropology with killing, in her dissertation days, she more openly asked if "one could conclude that ethnocentrism – bad anthropology – interferes with the conduct of war. But does good anthropology contribute to better killing?" Though an affirmative answer to this rhetorical question is implied, McFate left this question unanswered. McFate today categorically rejects claims that Human Terrain Teams are involved in using anthropology for what she referred to in 1994 as "better killing." But HTS anthropologist Audrey Roberts recently told the *Dallas Morning News* that she does not worry that her data may be used by the military when "looking for bad guys to kill."

McFate's dissertation identified two counterinsurgency elements requiring anthropological skills. The first involved psychological warfare operations, where cultural readings could be used for defining perceptions of one's enemy because "creating a mask for the enemy to wear is essential for psychological warfare," while the second argued that "knowledge of the enemy leads to a refinement in knowledge of how best to kill the enemy".

The desire to understand and re-humanize an enemy and the rationalizations of the enemy's motivations is at the heart of counterinsurgency operations, and McFate argued these goals hold vital roles for anthropology, writing that:

"The fundamental contradiction between 'knowing' your enemy in order to develop effective strategy, and de-humanizing him in order to kill efficiently is a theme to which we will return. Suffice to say, that the dogs of war do have a pedigree, which is often 'anthropological' and that counterinsurgency strategy depends not just on practical experience on the battlefield, but on historically derived analogical models of prior conflict. Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss, enemies are not only good to kill, enemies are good to think."

Here McFate expressed a desire for PSYOP anthropologists to use anthropological conceptions of cultural relativism to understand how enemies view the world and to use this information to better understand how one's own actions or use of symbols will be interpreted by enemies. McFate insists on ethnographies of enemies in order to out-think them, because "understanding the possible intentions of the enemy entails being able to think like the enemy; in other words, successful pre-emptive counter moves depend on simulating the strategy of the opponents."

"Paraphrasing Lévi-Strauss, enemies are not only good to kill, enemies are good to think."

McFate wanted military forces to understand how their actions have undesired consequences that they cannot understand, unless they learn to see things from within the enemy's mindset. This approach is often spun by McFate and her supporters as being a desire to use anthropology so that less violence will be used by U.S. forces. But McFate and HTS supporters desire minimal force because they believe it leads to a more efficient occupation, cooption and conquest of enemies, not because they object to occupation, cooption and conquest. This presents serious political problems for most anthropologists, and given anthropology's often odious past role as a handmaiden to colonialism, these issues easily move from the realm of individual politics to disciplinary politics, and properly raise the attentions of disciplinary professional associations.

Today, reliance on military robotics and drones in Iraq and Afghanistan progresses at a startling rate. In the span of the past six years, the robotic presence in these theaters has increased from a state when there were no military robotic units to today's total of over 12,000 robotic devices in use, with over 5,000 flying drones in use. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) like the *Predator*, with a flight range of over 2,000 miles, an ability to remain airborne at high elevations for over 24 hours at a time, advanced optical surveillance capabilities with the remote pilots linked by satellite half the world away, can track and kill humans on the ground. Other earthbound robots like the *PackBot* and *Talon* detonate landmines or roadside bombs, while some like Special Weapons Observation Reconnaissance Detection System have options of being armed with M-16s and other weapons.

The impact of this tactical shift has radically changed the U.S. military's ability to track and control occupied and enemy populations. As P.W. Singer shows in *Wired For War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*, battlefields and occupations are being revolutionized in ways that are quickly progressing beyond strategists' ability to understand how these increases in remote tracking, controlling and killing are impacting the cultures they are physically dominating. But, unsurprisingly, increases in robotic-panoptical monitoring and control have negative consequences for American interests, as mechanical manipulation reveals deep divisions between the worlds of machines and humans. To her credit, a decade and a half ago, McFate understood how such dynamics would play out, though her "practical" solution to such dilemmas is mired in irresolvable political and ethical problems for the anthropologists that would become the sensors for the machines dominating these battlefields.

Early-McFate's most insightful statements concerning military needs for anthropological knowledge focus on high-tech warfare's inability to decipher or address the human reactions and problems created by warfare. McFate understood that "global positioning systems and cruise missiles won't pay for your ammunition in Kurdistan. Low-intensity conflict requires human generated intelligence, local knowledge, and mission-oriented tactics. Atavistic modes of intelligence collection – espionage, infiltration – take precedence over more sophisticated techniques in these conditions. Thus, an interesting inversion oc-

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curs: as the technological sophistication of the enemy declines, reliance on intelligence derived from human sources (HUMINT) increases."

McFate was correct. While battlefields become increasingly dominated by high-tech gadgetry and panoptical drones, iris-scanners and computer tracking software, something like the currently attempted Human Terrain Teams will be needed to gather human knowledge on the ground. McFate's early writings clarify why those designing counterinsurgency campaigns crave anthropological knowledge – and given the economic collapse's impact on the anthropological job market, I would not preclude the likelihood of some measure of success, especially as these calls for anthropological assistance are increasingly framed in under false flags of "humanitarian assistance" or as reducing lethal engagements.

Nabokov riddles his novel *Lolita* with references to a form of destiny referred to as "McFate," which are cruel turns of apparent coincidence that set characters upon paths linking their destinies with larger themes. In Nabokov's world, the "synchronizing phantom" of McFate arranges what might have been chance events into patterns revealing if not providence, then at least a recurrence of trajectories. In only a partial Nabokovian sense, anthropology's McFate merges old anthropological and military themes together in ways revealing new uses for anthropology that the core of the discipline will be increasingly unable to control regardless of how offensive these uses are to core anthropological values.

It's not that anthropology and warfare haven't merged before; they have fatefully merged in all sorts of ways that have been historically documented. One stark difference is that today's counterinsurgent abuses of anthropological knowledge occur after the discipline of anthropology has clearly identified such activities as betraying basic ethical standards for protecting the interests and well-being of studied populations. Anthropologists' professional activites in the Second World War occurred without the existence of professional ethical codes of conduct, and it was a direct result of anthropological misconduct during the Vietnam War that the American Anthropological Association developed its first formalized Code of Ethics in 1971. It insisted that anthropologists' primary loyalties be to those studied, that research not lead to events harming research participants. There was to be no secret research. There were mandates for voluntary informed consent. That HTS throws up weak sophistic arguments claiming that their involvement in warfare reduces harm changes nothing.

The notion of using anthropologists and other social scientists to gather information, probe and soothe the feelings of those living in these environments, increasingly monitored and controlled by machines, strikes me as an anthropological abomination. Given what we know anthropologically about the complexities of *how* culture works, it also seems doomed to failure.

Today's counter-insurgent abuses of anthropological knowledge occur after the discipline of anthropology has clearly identified such activities as betraying basic ethical standards.

Simple notions of mechanical, disarticulated representations of culture can be found in the Army's new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, in which particular forms of anthropological theory were selected not because they "work" or are intellectually cohesive but because they offer the promise of "managing" the complexities of culture, as if increased sensitivities, greater knowledge, panoptical legibility could be used in a linear fashion to engineer domination. Such notions of culture fit the military's structural view of the world. It is the false promise of "culture" as a controllable, linear product that drives the COIN Team's particular construction of "culture." Within the military, the COIN Team is not alone in this folly: I've just finished a critique of the recently leaked *Special Forces Advisor Guide* (TC-31-73), and found a widespread adoption of dated anthropological notions of culture and personality theories, being selected and used to produce essentialized reductions of entire continents as having a limited set of uniform cultural traits.

What McFate's writings and those of fellow-counterinsurgency supporters do not address is just how difficult it is for anthropologists, or anyone else, to successfully pull off the sort of massive cultural engineering project, needed for a counterinsurgency-based victory Afghanistan. Those advocating anthropologically informed counterinsurgency are remarkably silent concerning just how difficult it is to bring about engineered culture change. There is no mention of applied anthropology's failures to get people to do simple things (like recycling, losing weight, reducing behaviors associated with the spread of HIV, etc.) – basic things that are in their own self-interest. These counterinsurgency advocates think they can leverage social structure and hegemonic narratives so that the occupied will internalize their own captivity as "freedom."

Beyond Human Terrain Systems, the Pentagon and the State Department can come up with other counterinsurgent uses for anthropologists – many of which will not alarm anthropologists in the ways that HTS, with its armed presence, does – but, given the manipulative forms of cultural engineering goals behind these projects, many of the same ethical and political issues are raised by anthropologists' participation in this work. Anthropologists and others being recruited to try and enact these counterinsurgency dreams risk confusing a supportive role in the wake of military decimation with engaging in humanitarian work. And the reliance of "soft power" on building hospitals, schools, supplying microloans and other agents of apparent gentle persuasions will help bring many liberals into the counterinsurgency fold, but it doesn't resolve the problems of the larger project, even if the machines seeking our help are armed not with bombs and bullets but with the dolling of needed loans, food, water, health and infrastructure. **CP**

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Mike Miller and the Golden Age of the Mission Coalition Organization

By Joe Paff

Mike Miller: *A Community Organizer's Tale: People and Power in San Francisco.* Heyday Books, Berkeley, California, 2009. 250 pp. $21.95.

When Obama was "outed" as an "Alinsky Organizer," we might have expected a defense of the role. After all, don't we want active and informed communities everywhere – neighborhoods, schools, parks, planning decisions, jobs, etc.? Instead, liberals held their breath and waited. Can the glib Barack finesse this one too? And, "Yes! He can!" So, instead of a discussion of Alinsky and his ideas of local mobilization and power, we were served a discussion of Mr. Obama's "Weatherman" friend.

Mike Miller's *Community Organizer's Tale* starts with Alinsky in the late Fifties and early Sixties: "the debate over Saul Alinsky that raged in the country was intense." This debate did not occur in the Weather Underground but in Catholic and mainline Protestant Churches. In 1966, meetings with Alinsky and neighborhood activists were sponsored by Presbyterians and Episcopalians in the Mission District in San Francisco and by the Catholic diocese in Oakland.

Mike Miller is an organizer. As a student at Berkeley in the mid-Fifties – the Berkeley of resurgent fraternities and sororities, compulsory ROTC, racist housing and employment, conformism and the "Organization Man" – Mike created a political party, SLATE, that advanced a program of fair housing, fair employment, anti-imperialism, an end to compulsory ROTC, end of capital punishment, and a robust defense of the Bill of Rights. In the early Sixties, Miller worked for five years for SNCC. I remember the meeting when we learned Mike had been the victim of "state sponsored terrorism" in Mississippi in 1963 and were all asked to give blood to replace Mike's requirements. While working as Bay Area SNNC coordinator, he had worked on the anti Urban Renewal (aka Negro Removal Program) fight in San Francisco. The subject of the book is this period until 1972. Since then, he has been executive director of Organize! Training Center.

So, Mike Miller is an organizer, like Farrell Dobbs, whose book *Teamster Power* often came to mind as I read this book. Often, reading the book, I got up and paced nervously around and felt guilty I didn't go to the public hearing on the new plan or the board meeting. Readers will re-evaluate how they behaved in the past, or did nothing, or resorted to an actor's rhetorical riff, or missed opportunities and alliances they didn't notice were possible, ways to have compelled negotiation; and ways to use people power wisely.

Between 1967 and 1973, an astounding popular mobilization of a vast coalition of diverse ethnic, neighborhood, ideological, and religious groups occurred in the Mission District of San Francisco.

But Miller calls this book a "tale" – and the tale has a heroine. She is the MCO – the Mission Coalition Organization. Between 1967 and 1973, an astounding popular mobilization of a vast coalition of diverse ethnic, neighborhood, ideological, and religious groups occurred in the Mission district of San Francisco. At its peak in 1971, more than 500 people were participating in daily and weekly activities of MCO, including activities on schools, parks, employment, tenants' rights, social services – and dealing with government agencies on all levels. MCO's total membership was 10,000. While this astounding story unfolded, I was living on the edge of the Mission and teaching political science at Stanford, and was totally distracted by my colleague Bruce Franklin and his cohorts with Red Berets and wooden rifles and North Vietnamese flag, and a long public trial of Bruce, resulting in his firing as a tenured professor.

So, it isn't surprising that the history of this time is distracted and silly.

This great mobilization occurred around two distinct federal programs: Urban Renewal and Model Cities. The first battle lasted two years and stopped the bulldozers from sweeping away the Mission. Many wonderful neighborhoods were destroyed and replaced by Urban Renewal – the Fillmore, the waterfront, downtown – so, when the Mission became the next target, it was easy to show everyone what happens when the fight is not fought. This story is vividly told. The second fight created the Mission Coalition Organization in response to Mayor Joe Alioto announcing the Model Cities program in 1968. The second battle – the story of the MCO – is the heart of the tale .

"Move your ass and your brains will follow" was a slogan I heard in the late Fifties – from Quakers and Catholic Workers. This is the rare book that believes that democracy, when mobilized, creates its own directions and contents. Mike Miller embarked on the process of turning discontents into proposals; directing the proposals to the right places with the right decision-makers; forcing negotiation through people power; using the energy of the negotiation to create more people power; turning the victories gained from choosing winnable fights into yet more power and more allies; and building a large, powerful organization that encompassed almost all of the local institutions and actors of the community.

And since Mike Miller was the MCO staff director starting in the summer of 1968 – with a self-imposed three-year limit based on Alinsky theory of the role of the outside organizer – his theories of organizing and the recreation of an "effective left" are presented in a slowly unfolding case study, as seen by a central actor. And by a central actor who, by Alinskyite definition, abstained from voting and competing.

There's a cast of characters: Elba Tuttle and Ben Martinez; Abel Gonzalez, Rev. William Grace and Rev. Dave Knotts; Alex Zermeno, and Rich Sorro; and, Joe Alioto and the Board of Supervisors; and,

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of course, the ambitions of all these actors are considerable, and the more so as the organization grew. But just as you finally learn all their names and many others, you notice the MCO is the heroine. There comes a point, as you read, that you sense our heroine is in danger. You become protective, wish that the leaders could see her in all her beauty and grace. You wish that Mike Miller would forget his Alinsky Oath, stop abstaining, enter the fray, withdraw his self-imposed three-year limit, and take a stand. And you know you're hooked on the story. You want to be a part of the tale, to take a stand yourself.

The book is, on one hand, a workbook – a manual for one's own activism – a quite clear set of criteria for evaluating one's own past efforts to influence social policies. And, yet, since the author presents the actors as recipients of these training "organizing" ideas, there is the quality of an experiment. Here an organizer is hired by people who know what they're getting very clearly, who act together through a series of amazing victories and, at the moment of becoming the entire "politics" of the Mission, collide with the spoils of victory.

In this case, the spoils are federal dollars provided by poverty programs directed by Republicans, and the author wonders if, perhaps, the designers of these programs knew the results that would unfold. This collision is especially dramatic and "political" because the author refuses to make any judgments concerning motives of self-interest or opportunism. Each actor is presented in his or her actions, positions and words, as if they meant what they said. And if you, like me, follow up on their subsequent lives, you'll find that wherever they went or what they did or are doing, they remember this as their finest hour.

Today, anyone who mentions the MCO does so as if remembering the most perfect moment of their life. They look off with a faraway gaze as if seeing a golden glow.

Today, anyone who mentions the MCO does so as if remembering the most perfect moment of their life. They look off with a faraway gaze as if seeing a golden glow. All over the Mission there are small pockets of MCO survival. And every big event evokes memories of what we could do if it came to it. Mike Miller walks you through this magical time with the conviction that you – the reader – could do it too. Too often, Great political action evaporates and vanishes. Here is a rare record of unfolding political events and actions analyzed from the perspective of democratic empowerment. **CP**

Joe Paff taught at UC Berkeley and Stanford and lives in Petrolia. He can be reached at joepaff@yahoo.com.

Buy Mike Miller's book online or at a bookstore or contact Anna Pritt, operations manager, at anna@heydaybooks.com. (510) 549-3564 ext. 304, fax (510) 549-1889. or go to http://www.heydaybooks.com.

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